

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

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March 10, 2020

To Zoning Board of Appeals

RE: Summer Street 40B application

Dear Zoning Board of Appeals,

Thank you for providing this office with the opportunity to comment on the Comprehensive Permit Application submitted by Omni Development LLC at 55 Summer Street. This proposed 300-unit rental/owner project will, without question, have substantial impacts upon our Community, the South Walpole neighborhoods that are in and around this development, our infrastructure and our municipal and school operations. The Select Board is respectfully requesting that the Zoning Board of Appeals consider the following items as part of the public hearing process.

The project as proposed is not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. The Select Board recognizes that, as expressed in the State's Design Guidelines, 40Bs typically introduce greater density into a neighborhood than what currently exists or is allowed by zoning. But, we also support the assertion in the Guidelines that *"it is important to mitigate the height and scape of the buildings to the adjoining site...it is particularly important to consider the predominate buildings types, setbacks and roof lines of the existing context."*¹ And while the DHCD 40B guidelines state that there is no "rule of thumb"² for appropriate density, the rental unit portion is far denser than what exists in the surrounding neighborhood. The siting of the buildings on the property, roof lines, and architectural style must be readdressed to more thoughtfully fit into the surrounding context.

The Select Board is concerned about the location of the driveway into the property abutting the MBTA tracks. With the number of units and number of young children in the complex and playing in the area, the complex would need significant safeguards to protect children and provide barriers between the complex and trains.

¹ The Cecil Group, Inc. (2011, January). *Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40b Design Reviews* Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/10/16/handbook-approachtoch40b-designreviewa.pdf>


² DHCD. *Department of Housing and Community Development Guidelines, updated December 2014. G.L.C.40B Comprehensive Permit Projects*. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/10/10/guidecomprehensivepermit.pdf>. IV-3.

The Select Board is concerned about the single-access road into the project site serving 300 units. This condition poses serious safety risks. Additionally, the access drive is located precariously close to an existing at grade MBTA crossing. This is a high-speed train crossing with functioning street gates, which will cause traffic to stop and back up at the gates well past the entrance/exit and likely cause a confusing and hazardous traffic condition.

Additionally, the Select Board is concerned about children getting from the development safely to schools. The pedestrian route to school lacks adequate infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks and safety lighting. The Select Board urges the ZBA to work with the developer on the opportunity for off-site improvements to mitigate the impact of their proposal. The Select Board takes pedestrian safety as a high priority and Walpole is a Complete Streets Community. This development should seek to better meet these standards as the public hearing process moves forward.

The Select Board would also encourage the ZBA to work with the developer to find creative design solutions that respect the underlying wetlands and more intentionally consider the surrounding neighborhood. Given the large scale and impact of this project, anything less would be a loss of an important opportunity to integrate the development into the Town and create a vibrant community.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim O'Neil". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first letter "J" is large and loops around the first part of the name.

Jim O'Neil,
Chairman